



Vipassana Hawaii

Winter/Spring 2009

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We are deeply grateful to those who donated with great largesse towards the purchase of the land for the Hawai'i Insight Meditation Center. They made possible and laid the foundation for all that follows.

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HAWAII INSIGHT MEDITATION CENTER UPDATE

A Burgeoning Operation in Kapa'au as HIMC Reactivates

We finally secured the 200+ acres of land for the Hawai'i Insight Meditation Center after an 8-year escrow process and began moving forward again, hiring staff and planning for construction.

Pat Linton came on board as our first executive director, and Jack Hoyt, the architect for the original site plan and schematic design, donned a "second hat" as land manager. Jack hired a local crew who cleared brush, trimmed trees, mended fences, and mowed pastures on the 60 or so acres surrounding the 15-acre campus.



and modern renaissance man, visited from BC Canada to discuss plans for alternative energy at HIMC with Jack, Steven, and Michele (see *VOLUNTEERS: RAY LIPOVSKY*). Eileen Pedersen, a long-time student of Steven and Michele's from New Mexico, joined Ray, Jack, and Michele to discuss community building and communications system development. Like so many others who set foot on the HIMC land, Eileen was "blown away" (her words) by its power and beauty and vowed to return in summer 2009. Eileen also broke ground for this newsletter.

When Pat decided to return to his former post at another nonprofit, Jack agreed to put on a "third hat," as ED. In mid-October he hired Carol Perry, a writer with grant and nonprofit experience, as development coordinator. Carol had met Steven and Michele during the whirlwind of activity surrounding the early days of the HIMC land-acquisition and special-permit processes. Jack and Carol have been neighbors for a decade, and their properties adjoin the Vipassana land.

The project is drawing in an array of talents. Last October, Ray Lipovsky, a long-time friend of Steven's



Michele, Ray, Jack

Pre-Construction Planning Phase Under Way

We have launched the HIMC pre-construction planning phase, a crucial set of actions that prepare us to break ground in compliance with the requirements and deadlines of the County special permit granted in 2000. ED Jack Hoyt is initially directing his energies and our funds toward the following:

- *Business plan:* Extensive researching and consultation with EDs at other centers and a local business-plan specialist are helping us tailor a business plan to the current economic climate and establish strategies that support Center operations.
- *Design development:* The old schematic drawings from the special permit application will be transformed into a set of plans with technical specifications, in preparation for construction drawings; this action requires the services of the project architect, engineers, and alternative energy consultants.

We also need to plan a capital campaign to bring in funding for the first two (of three) construction phases. In phase I, we will start with an administration/visitor building, to accommodate small retreats, and a facility manager's office, to initially function as a construction headquarters and land manager's office. In phase II, we will add a kitchen/dining hall, to initially double as a meditation/conference space, and retreatant housing. Our goal is to be operating a 30- to 40-bed facility by the end of 2013 (County deadline). In phase III, as yet unscheduled, we will complete the Center with the meditation hall complex, additional housing, and support facilities. All the while, we will be putting in gardens and orchards and installing sustainable energy and water systems to live in more conscious partnership with the land.

We held our first meditation sitting on the land March 15, 2009, and our first HIMC retreat is scheduled for June 26-July 5, 2009 (see "INAUGURAL HIMC RETREAT: SUMMER 2009" for details). For background on the Center's genesis and ongoing updates, please visit our website. — CP

A FOUNDER REVISITS THE HIMC VISION

The core elements envisaged for the Hawai'i Insight Meditation Center — fusion Dhamma, youth, and caretaking the land — have not wavered since we first set eyes on the land in 1998. I do not forget. I think those of us there — Michele, Jake Davis, William Bennington — knew we had found the dream land.

The 2,500-year-old transmission of Dhamma entered Hawai'i (and the US mainland) from Burma nearly 35 years ago. An organic fusion has been unfolding ever since between revered Burmese meditation masters and some of the Western students they provided exceptional training to. Now, they often teach side by side: Asian with Western, ordained monk/nun with lay person, classic traditional with contemporary style, male with female. This powerful tension arc of complementary opposites forges ways of teaching that offer precise practice styles according to individual need: this is fusion Dhamma.

Every generation carries the responsibility of caring for and passing on its knowledge to its youth. Arguably, we have never known such difficult times on so many levels. Yet possibility and resiliency seem intrinsic qualities of both people and planet. We cannot cease from efforts to change for the better. How do we guide the generations rising with skillful means, compassion, and wisdom? What do we preserve, what do we build? HIMC will offer ways for youth and elders to nurture each other and the planet toward what is good.

Our vision embraces an ecosystem reflective of right living with the resources available to us, honoring the abundance of some (sun, wind) and the limits of others (water). The land has rich soil leached from Kohala Mountain, the oldest part of Hawai'i Island. As cultural historians have long known and archaeologists are confirming, this land held thriving communities and was chosen by powerful leaders of pre-modern Hawai'i. Why is this? Though we may never know for certain, perhaps there is a hint in this: No one who comes here leaves with less than a profoundly felt sense of place. This land is worthy to protect in perpetuity.

Since beginning the land-purchase process in 1999, we faced a decade of challenge while holding the HIMC vision in our hearts. HIMC will be a refuge reflecting elegant simplicity, allowing the inherent nature of the land to help us rediscover our luminous consciousness so we may bring peace, compassion, and wisdom to ourselves and the world around us.

— Steven

DANA AND HIMC FUNDRAISING

Greetings of aloha from Hawai'i. On behalf of the Board of Directors of Vipassana Hawai'i, I invite your 'kokua' (assistance) in our efforts to realize our shared vision of the Hawai'i Insight Meditation Center, a unique fusion East-West retreat center in Kapa'au. We purchased an auspicious piece of land and have now entered the pre-construction planning phase of the project (see *HIMC UPDATE* for details). We need \$150,000 to complete this phase and move forward.

In the Buddhist tradition, giving of any kind is unquestionably good. The Buddha encourages us to give generously whenever anyone asks for help. We live in perilous times and must all be concerned and cautious how we allocate our funds. It is with this in mind that I request your kokua for HIMC. The actual rewards of giving depend strongly on the climate in which the giving occurs. The giver and the recipient — the donor and the organization — share an equal responsibility in fostering a climate that makes the most of generosity. If both are serious about putting the Buddha's teachings into practice, the end result naturally benefits the perpetuation of the Dhamma.

The teachers, board, and staff of Vipassana Hawai'i have worked diligently to reach this stage in our development. We ask you now to contribute financially to HIMC through the enclosed envelope or our website. We also ask you to inform friends of like mind who might be interested in sharing our vision and

willing to contribute. Please take the time to pass forward this newsletter (also available on our website) and, if appropriate, let our staff know whom they may contact on the project's behalf. Thank you.

A hui hou, Marc Cohen, President of the Board

INAUGURAL HIMC RETREAT: SUMMER 2009

We are holding our first retreat on the HIMC land June 26-July 5, 2009, with founders Steven and Michele teaching. We invite you to participate in this unique inaugural event on the northern tip of Hawai'i Island where the landscape and energy are unparalleled.

Be prepared for rustic conditions and rudimentary facilities. We have two huge tents, one for kitchen/dining, the other for meditation sittings. Sites will be available for camping. Bathing will be in a shower house yet to be built, with water ambient to warm; several portable toilets will be set up. The vegetarian menu will be simple and the food wholesome, including local produce.

We would be extremely grateful for help with the retreat or larger project from anyone arriving beforehand or staying afterward. Please contact ED Jack Hoyt if you are interested in volunteering and let him know your timeframe and skills.

Cost of this 10-day retreat is \$495. Visit our website for retreat details, registration, and updates.

“SUKI YOGI” LAKE RETREAT AT THE FLOATING RAFT BUNGALOWS IN THAILAND

It is difficult to imagine the jaw-dropping natural beauty of Khlong long (lake) adjacent to Khao Sok park, in the south of Thailand. The New Year's retreat is held in a remote venue in Surat Thani province. Dramatic limestone karsts frame the lake with great majesty. This unique geological environment,



spared from logging, is a rich and diverse sanctuary for many rare species, including the much-loved gibbon apes. The unmistakable mating call of the gibbons can be heard echoing across the lake, a song that rings like a search for union. Khlong long is a place that holds human beings in their rightful place, just one species on this great Mother Earth — no more or less important than any other group of sentient beings.

The notion of interconnectedness is innate and powerful at this retreat. When the animals start to reveal themselves from the dense jungle, there is no doubt that the sila (ethics) and safety of the practice, invoked before the retreat begins, are felt in many realms. A pair of otters wanders up onto the floating dock to snoop around the bathrooms where butterflies frolic in the sun. These simple yet special moments allow joy to bubble up spontaneously. This is one reason



why I've affectionately named this the “Suki Yogi,” or “Happy Yogi,” Retreat.

Living and practicing on a floating bamboo settlement are a great way to investigate the nature of water. It is the vessel that holds us and it comprises most of our physical body. You become intimately connected with the daily rhythms of the lake, whether sitting, walking, kayaking, or bathing. For anyone who relishes fresh warm water, it is a paradise for learning swimming meditation. You often feel like a baby being rocked to sleep by the lapping of the waves.



The sangha was an intimate group this year. En route to the lake we had the rare opportunity to converse with each and every yogi, and by the close of the retreat, we knew everyone's name. Geow, a gentle, playful Burmese woman, returned to offer massages, perfect for releasing those gripping meditator's muscles. Some of us who practice yoga worked to maintain awareness of our bodies in each pose.

It is hard to share my retreat experiences without remarking on eating meditation, or the lack of it! The food was so delectable that it was difficult at first to eat less, though this occurs naturally over time as eating becomes more mindful. We were nourished by locally grown produce and fish caught fresh from the lake. Lovingly prepared and offered, pomelo and papaya, ka-nai (a bitter green) and black bean sauce and rice porridge helped fortify us for practice.



Khlong long is a wonderful setting to hear the wisdoms of the Dhamma offered so generously by Michele and Steven. We all felt great gratitude for their commitment to teach such a small sangha this year. I so enjoyed the rich Dhamma talks and the vivid images painted by our teachers' well-crafted stories. If you have been considering this retreat, do check it out. It might not be a hidden treasure for too much longer.

— Story and photo of Steven & Michele by Allison Urowitz; landscape photos by Rebecca Wachtel

SEEKING REFUGE: A HEARTFELT EXPERIENCE AT A KYASWA MONASTERY RETREAT IN BURMA

I love the simplicity of life on retreat at Kyaswa, located in the heart of the Sagaing Hills in central Burma. My kuti (hut) is at the crest of a picturesque spot that overlooks the great Irrawaddy River. It is the perfect setting to contemplate the passing nature of all things with nonjudgmental awareness; to practice being fully present; and to see things as they are and not as we want them to be — essentially, learning the tools of navigating this sacred dance we call life. When friends ask me “Why Burma?” as I am about to go on retreat,



View from Dennis's kuti

I tell them I want to go to the heart of the insight meditation practice I am engaged in.

The following are a plethora of joyful memories I will always treasure:

- Young student monks chanting the metta (loving-kindness) suttas.
- The sacred stillness and noble silence of the early morning and late evening meditation sittings.
- The slow, mindful monastic-led procession down the stone steps of the multi-terraced monastery to the dining hall for meals and tea.
- The attentive, friendly staff who prepared and served our meals and the comforting presence of my four meal mates.
- The respectful bowing to the three gems (the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha) before and after sitting and meals.
- The howling of the pack of monastery dogs when the meal bells were rung.
- The magnificent golden sunrise and reflecting band of light on the Irrawaddy River that greeted us each morning.
- The young nuns in their colorful veils and robes who came to our meditation hall each evening from nearby nunneries to chant the metta suttas.
- The inspiring Dhamma talks by and interviews with our teachers Michele McDonald and Rebecca Bradshaw. I have sat on retreat with Michele twice in Burma and once in Sonoma and always enjoy how she makes the teachings of the Buddha come alive. She cuts right to the heart of any impediments to practice I am struggling with.
- The poignant teachings of the gifted meditation master Sayadaw U Lakkhana and his leading us in chanting the eight precepts in his colorful pagoda.
- Generosity through meal dana, and dedication of the merits to loved ones and for the benefit of all beings.
- Three Catholic sisters participating in the retreat. This is my birth faith, and it

was refreshing that the Church granted them permission to study Vipassana meditation. After the retreat, Sisters Kathleen and Margaret invited me to dinner at their apartment on the grounds of Sacred Heart Cathedral. We listened to Tibetan music and chanted; Sister Kathleen recited a poem by memory and we meditated before breaking bread. She teaches English near the church, and I was asked to field questions about meditation and cultural differences from an enthusiastic group of students.

- The resiliency and good naturedness of the Burmese people, especially the children. Being able to participate in the MettaDana Project is a real heart opener. Giving out uniforms to the young children of the Sagaing school was a great way to connect with the community.



Giving out school uniforms with Sayadaw U Lakkhana presiding

- A trip down the Irrawaddy River. After the retreat I rented a large boat with a captain and his wife. My friends Beth Goldring, a Buddhist nun and founder of the Cambodian AIDS Project, and Maybelle, a native of Mandalay whom I befriended on a Kyaswa retreat in 2006, joined me. Visiting with local villagers who were harvesting peanuts, corn, and green beans, we moved from one stilted wood home to another, taking tea and absorbing the welcoming presence of these wonderful people.

Mythology scholar Joseph Campbell said that what we are looking for is not so much the meaning of life, but the experience of being alive. When in Burma, especially at Kyaswa, I feel fully alive, fully engaged in the moment, and I witness my connection to all things. This was another reminder to awaken the heart, for when that happens all things are possible.

— Story and photos by Dr. Dennis Augustine

There seems to be a point in every retreat where the Dhamma takes care of everything, and all you have to do is rest in the space and carry on with balanced effort.

— Allison Urowitz



DONOR APPRECIATION

We could not do what we do without you, our supporters. Some of you are new to us, and others are long-time friends. We thank you all!

Though Jack and I have prior associations with Vipassana Hawai'i, we are new as staff and still learning who many of you are. Please let us know if we don't have your most up-to-date contact information or inadvertently overlooked you because of omissions in our files. Email me at cperry@vipassanahawaii.org with updates and corrections. — CP

Consider making a monthly contribution to Vipassana Hawai'i. This is an easy, "painless" way to support us on an ongoing basis, and you can conveniently set up an automatic monthly funds transfer via our website. Every dollar makes a difference. Thank you.

We are grateful for your support during the tough economic times of 2008

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VOLUNTEERS: RAY LIPOVSKY

This winter Vipassana Hawai'i was blessed with the arrival of Ray Lipovsky, a 'volunteer' from a tiny island near Vancouver Island, BC Canada. Ray met Steven Smith as well as Jack Kornfield in India in 1982 when Ray was being ordained; they have been good friends ever since.

Steven knew that Ray had put together alternative energy systems, a water distribution system, and a cell phone network on a larger island near his own. At Steven's request Ray visited briefly last fall to see how he might be of use in our efforts to build HIMC. At that time Eileen Pedersen also was here giving us a hand (see *A BURGEONING OPERATION IN KAPA'AU...*). When I told Ray how helpful it was to have Eileen pitching in, Ray (and Eve) decided to visit for the winter.

Ray and I have pushed many projects along. Maybe even more importantly, he gave us the sense that our ambitious goals for HIMC are not insurmountable. Ray helped us plan our energy loads and study the land's potential for both photovoltaic and wind systems. Thanks to Ray's extensive background in food processing, we were able to explore possible uses of our agriculturally zoned land beyond gardening — cacao to chocolate, medicinal herbs, boutique coffee, spices — which might develop into an income stream to help support HIMC.

Personally, perhaps the best part of Ray's visit is that I have a new friend who is resourceful, skilled, innovative, and equally irreverent. And, to top it off, Ray was happy to work for bananas — lots of bananas — but since we have them in abundance we were all quite pleased with the arrangement. We look forward to more visits from Ray and Eileen, as well as any of you who have the means and are willing to give us a hand. — JH



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